

**Project Management and
Capacity Building**
an analysis of the information on the EVIS database

Evaluation Unit
1995

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Project Management and Capacity Building: an analysis of the information on the EVIS database

The EVIS database contains information drawn from consultants' evaluations of IDRC projects, programs and partner institutions. It allows users to access summary information about evaluations undertaken throughout the Centre, read direct quotations from the evaluation reports, and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. EVIS is a valuable tool for accessing corporate memory, containing the lessons learned from past evaluations on the design, implementation, results and issues addressed in Centre initiatives.*

The following pages contain an analysis of information from the database on two important issues currently facing IDRC: **project management** and **capacity building**. After some general observations and initial findings, the report is divided into two sections, on these issues. The first section contains an analysis of five questions from EVIS. Two deal with the host institution, and three with IDRC's roles in project management. The second section analyzes four questions. Two are general questions on capacity building, and two are more specific, relating to training and sustainability. The comments from each question are analyzed, and a summary of key issues and lessons learned are listed at the end of each sub-section. Finally, the report ends with a few comments on carrying out analysis of data in EVIS, with suggestions for how others in the Centre might use the database to draw on IDRC's past experience and the lessons learned through evaluation.

General Observations and Methodology

Some general notes on the information from EVIS should be noted before beginning the analysis. For most of the questions analyzed in this report, the highest percentage of answers was positive. All EVIS questions used in this report are phrased such that a *Yes* answer means that something good was reported in the evaluation. For instance, Question 3.01 asks, "Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?" A *Yes* answer means that Yes, the host institution did effectively administer and manage the initiative; a *No* answer means it did not. The highest percentage of answers to 7 of the 9 questions analyzed was *Yes*. The questions with the highest percentage of *Yes* answers said that yes, IDRC has an acceptable method of operation, yes, projects met their training objectives, and yes research and institutional capacity was improved. Of the two questions analyzed where *No*'s dominated over *Yes* answers, one (5.01, which asks for comments on institution strengthening) should be disregarded, as will be explained later. This just leaves one of the nine questions (regarding IDRC's administration and management of projects) in which negative responses were more plentiful than positive ones. Thus, *in IDRC project and program evaluations, there are more positive comments on project management and capacity building than there are negative ones.*

*

See Appendix A and B for a fuller description of the EVIS database and the questions it contains.

Another general observation from the data has to do with the themes generally covered in evaluation reports done by consultants. Questions having to do with IDRC's partner organizations or project outputs and impacts were addressed more often than were questions which called for a critique of IDRC's role in the initiative. Of the 157 reports currently on EVIS, over half provide answers to questions about the training provided through the initiative, research or institutional capacity building, and the host's administration, management and technical support of the project. However, only 31-38% of the reports address IDRC's role in administration, management, and/or technical support or its method of operation in general. This suggests that when consultants are asked to do an evaluation of IDRC projects, Centre personnel fail to ensure they do a thorough critique of IDRC's own role in the initiatives. IDRC misses out on receiving valuable critiques and suggestions for improvement when it avoids having its own performance evaluated.

...when consultants are asked to do an evaluation of IDRC projects, Centre personnel fail to ensure they do a thorough critique of IDRC's own role in the initiatives.

In general, the percentage of *Yes* and *No* answers and accompanying comments show that IDRC has had a number of problems with host institutions in terms of project management. Overall, there were only slightly more positive comments than negative ones concerning host institutions' administration and management as well as the technical support they provided for IDRC-supported initiatives. Regarding IDRC's roles in project management, the Centre's method of supporting research for development, its philosophy and usual approach, were strongly endorsed in EVIS data; however, there were significantly more negative than positive comments concerning its administration and management of initiatives. Regarding capacity building, IDRC projects usually achieved their training objectives, and succeeded in improving research and institutional capacity among their Southern partners. In all the sets of answers and comments, evaluators raised important issues and made numerous suggestions for IDRC officials to consider regarding project management and capacity building.

Finally, before getting into the analysis, some comments should be made about the EVIS database and how it was used in this study. EVIS is set up in a question and answer format. The questions ask about project planning, implementation and operations, results and outcomes and development issues. Answers are taken from individual evaluation reports and come in two parts: a *short answer* of *Yes*, *No* or *Yes/No*, and a *long answer*, which is a direct quotation from the evaluation report that addresses the issue raised by the question. If no part of the report deals with the issue, the question is left blank.

Yes/No responses indicate that the report commented on various aspects of the question being asked, with some parts supporting a *Yes* answer and others a *No*. All relevant comments from the report are quoted. In order to analyze the *Yes* and *No* quotes of each question for this study, *Y/N* comments are added to the straight *Yes*'s and *No*'s. For example, for question 3.01, there

are 31 *Yes* answers, 26 *No*'s and 30 *Y/N*'s. The analysis of the *Yes* and *No* answers proceeds as if there were 61 *Yes* answers (31 *Yes* plus 30 yes's in the *Y/N*) and 56 *No* answers (26 *No* plus 30 no's in the *Y/N*).

The long answers to EVIS questions provide the majority of the material for this study. In reading through the long answers to individual EVIS questions, several themes would emerge from the evaluation report quotations. These themes are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively in this report. Throughout the analysis, the percentages of answers which fall into the various categories of responses to each question do not add up to 100. This is because some comments in the long answers defy categorization or generalization while others cover two or more themes and so are counted more than once. This can be seen in a quick look at the table of themes covered in long answers to question 3.01.

Table 2. EVIS Question 3.01: Host Administration and Management N=87

Major themes in answers to "Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
staff	33	(20)	48	(27)
institutional structure and management	28	(17)	30	(17)
budget/finances	13	(8)	16	(9)
monitoring and evaluation	7	(4)	14	(8)
other				
staff diversity and openness	3	(2)		
problems in project planning and design			11	(6)
Totals:	84%	51	119%	67

While there are 61 *Yes* long answers for question 3.01 (31 *Yes* plus 30 yes's in the *Y/N*), only 51 (84%) different comments in those long answers are categorizable for this analysis. On the other hand, there are 56 *No* long answers for question 3.01 (26 *No* plus 30 no's in the *Y/N*), but 67 (119%) different comments within those answers touch on the main themes identified in the analysis. Because the number of answers and comments are not equal throughout the analysis, I have not included "total" rows in the tables for individual EVIS questions. Though perhaps somewhat untidy, doing the analysis in this way gives a more accurate representation of the range of comments given for each question.

Having made these general observations and explanations, we begin with the analysis of project management and capacity building.

1. Project Management

Five questions on EVIS pertain to project management: two addressing how well the host administered, managed and provided technical support for the project, and three dealing with IDRC's performance and method of operation. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. EVIS Questions on Project Management

#	EVIS Question	% of reports with answers
3.01	Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?	55
3.02	Did the host institution provide the necessary technical support for the initiative?	59
3.05	Were the donor's administrative and management procedures appropriate?	31
3.06	Was the donor's technical assistance adequate?	38
3.08	Was the donor's "method" of operation acceptable?	31

1.1 Overview

As will be seen in the analysis below, the EVIS data shows that in project management, host institutions were effective in just over half of the initiatives evaluated. The ratios of *Yes/No/Yes/No* answers show that there were relatively even numbers of positive and negative comments given on the host's responsibilities in project management. When the *Yes/No* comments are added to those from the *Yes* and *No* answers, the percentages 52:48 emerges as the incidence of positive comments to negative ones in both questions 3.01 and 3.02.

The ratios vary considerably for the questions on IDRC's side of project management. Although there were fewer answers given for the last three questions analyzed in this section, the ratios of positive to negative comments varied from 43:57 for question 3.05, 54:46 for question 3.06 and 66:34 for question 3.08. These numbers suggest that evaluators mentioned a number of areas which could improve in terms of IDRC's administrative and management procedures, that IDRC's technical assistance was usually adequate, and that most evaluators had good things to say about IDRC's method of operation. Thus, IDRC's general approach to research for development is commended in EVIS, but the database holds a number of criticisms about IDRC's administration and management of initiatives. The comments for all of these questions on project management are analyzed in detail below.

... IDRC's general approach to research for development is commended in EVIS, but the data hold a number of criticisms about IDRC's administration and management of initiatives.

1.2 Host Administration and Management

Question 3.01 Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?

YES: 31 36%
 NO: 26 30%
 Y/N: 30 34%

Total: 87 55% of all EVIS reports

Table 2. EVIS Question 3.01: Host Administration and Management

N=87

Major themes in answers to “Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?”	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
staff	33	(20)	48	(27)
institutional structure and management	28	(17)	30	(17)
budget/finances	13	(8)	16	(9)
monitoring and evaluation	7	(4)	14	(8)
other				
staff diversity and openness	3	(2)		
problems in project planning and design			11	(6)

55% of all EVIS files answered the question 3.01, “Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?” Of these, 36% answered with a *Yes*, 30% answered *No*, and 34% answered *Yes/No*. Table 2 outlines the major themes which emerged in a qualitative analysis of the long answers to question 3.01. As explained on page 3, the long answers on EVIS quote all portions of an evaluation study which address the question being asked; thus some short answers are accompanied by quotes which address two or more of the major themes. Conversely, a few long answers contained no comments which could be included in the analysis, mainly because they were specific to the project being evaluated. The percentages given in the table denote the number of *Yes* answers or *No* answers which mentioned the theme listed (i.e., 33% of the *Yes* answers and 48% of the *No* answers dealt staff issues). Throughout this report, all tables outlining themes in quantitative analyses of long answers use this format.

The comments given in the answers to Question 3.01 are categorized along five themes: staff, institutional structure and management, budget and finances, monitoring and evaluation, and other. The percentages given in this table, as with all other tables for individual EVIS questions in this report, refer to the number of answers *out of either the Yes answers or the No answers* which include that theme.

staff: Obviously, whether or not a host institution effectively administers and manages an initiative has much to do with its staff, as is reflected in the answers to question 3.01. Issues about staff made up the largest category of both positive and negative answers. In cases where the host did well in administration and management, evaluators commented on the well-qualified and well-coordinated staff at the institution. Positive staff attributes include:

- ° stability
- ° team work and effective leadership
- ° good coordination
- ° commitment to the institution and its projects.

Almost half of the *No* answers to this question raised the issue of staffing. Problems evaluators encountered in host institutions were:

- ° too few employees
- ° personality conflicts among staff members
- ° under-qualified personnel
- ° inadequate leadership.

Others reported problems in communication within and between institutions, as well as unclear divisions of duties. Issues of staffing are clearly at the root of a host institution's effectiveness in administration and management of IDRC initiatives.

institutional structure and management: As shown in Table 2, this was the second most often cited theme in both the *Yes* and the *No* answers. 28% of the positive answers stated that the organization and management of the host institution provided a good framework for administration and management. However, this was provided in different ways:

Centres which have spent some time thinking about management -- including the appointment of full time directors -- seem to have greater control over their resources than those that believe institutional leadership can be exercised a few hours a week.¹

PIIE (Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Education) has also established a number of mechanisms to reinforce, articulate and facilitate its institutional, academic, administrative and inter-institutional development process... For its day-to-day operations, CIDE has a Management Committee made up of the Director, those in charge of each of the areas, and the two above-mentioned coordinators. Thus, in practice management becomes directly involved in the operations of the institution.²

The African Economic Research Consortium's record with institutional architecture and construction is quite remarkable. The organization is firmly in place, healthy and vibrant. Like any institution, it faces challenges and uncertainty ahead, but it demonstrates the flexibility and resilience to deal with them.³

Three answers emphasized flexibility as being key to the institution's success. In another case, the host's initiatives for developing a legal and institutional framework were crucial to the successful implementation of the project.⁴ Of the negative responses, 30% cited problems with the institution's organization and style as hindering effective administration and management. Some structures were too unstable or changed too constantly; some lacked a coordinator to properly manage the initiative; and others were just so complex that lines of communication, accountability and decision-making were unclear and cumbersome.

budget/finances: The way the host institution dealt with budgeting was the key variable in many EVIS answers to question 3.01. In 13% of the positive answers, sound financial management and positive returns on investments led the evaluator to argue that the host institution ably

administered and managed the initiative. On the other hand, 16% of the negative responses highlighted problems with budgeting, finance and resource allocation. Some of the hosts' budgeting problems had to do with being inflexible with finance allocations, or not having an independent budget to work with. As will be seen, financial issues emerge as a major element in EVIS comments on project management.

monitoring and evaluation: Issues of monitoring and evaluation also came up in a significant number of both positive and negative responses. Good monitoring contributed to effective project administration and management in 7% of the positive responses. A lack of monitoring and evaluation led to ineffectiveness in the host institutions in 14% of the reports which had negative answers. Evaluators put responsibility for monitoring and evaluation not just on IDRC, but also on host institutions.

other: Two other comments in this set of answers are worthy of note. First, 3% of the positive responses credited effective administration and management by the host institution to its staff's intellectual diversity and openness. This allowed the institutions to take on projects which could not be done at any other institution in their region, and to support other bodies in generating new knowledge for policy and training. Second, 11% of the negative responses cited problems in the planning and design of the initiative as leading to problems in administration and management. Priority setting and planning seemed to be chronic problems in some of the institutions and groups with which IDRC works.

Lessons Learned: Host administration and management

- ▶ A host institution's management of its staff is the most important variable in providing effective administration and management of IDRC-supported initiatives.
- ▶ Benefits can be expected from:
 - > adequate qualifications
 - > good coordination and networking within and between institutions
 - > clear lines of communication, accountability and decision making
 - > flexibility within the institution to adapt to new circumstances
 - > regular monitoring and evaluation
 - > institutionally-specific characteristics, such as intellectual pluralism.

1.3 Host Technical Support

Question 3.02 Did the host provide the necessary technical support for the initiative?

YES:	36	39%
NO:	32	35%
Y/N:	24	26%

Total:	92	59% of all EVIS reports
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Table 3. EVIS Question 3.02: Host technical support

Major themes in comments on "Did the host provide the necessary technical support for the initiative?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
staff	55	(33)	71	(40)
facilities	30	(18)	27	(15)
coordination	10	(6)	5	(3)

There were 92 answers for the question 3.02 on EVIS, "Did the host provide the necessary technical support for the initiative?" Of these, 39% were *Yes*, 35% were *No*, and 26% were *Yes/No*. Combining the positive and negative comments, the averages in Table 3 are calculated out of 60 *Yes*'s and 56 *No*'s. The comments to this question fall into three categories: staff, facilities, and coordination.

staff: The majority of responses, both positive and negative, to question 3.02 dealt with staffing issues. 55% of the positive responses claimed that the adequate technical support given by the host institution was achieved through its staff. They were capable and knowledgeable on the technical aspects of the initiative. On the other hand, in 40 (71%) of the negative responses, reasons of staff were given for the inadequate technical support provided by the host institution. Staff were inadequate with regard to training, technical competence, leadership or commitment. The large number of comments in this category suggest that staff issues are crucial to the technical aspects of program management, as they were to administration and management.

facilities: The next largest category in both the positive and negative responses had to do with the technical support facilities offered by the host institution. In 30% of the positive responses, facilities were adequate. Of these, half of the comments remarked on equipment being available, several referred to acceptable library and information services, and others spoke of computers and/or laboratory facilities being adequate. Of the negative responses, 27% noted inadequate facilities. While some institutions suffered from unsatisfactory laboratories and equipment, other comments focussed on a lack of computers and software. Some spoke of poor physical infrastructure, including the lack of a building or electricity, and a couple criticized inadequate library, data and information services.

coordination: Coordinating research activities with other individuals and institutions came up in both positive and negative responses. 10% of the positive responses alluded to useful coordinating and networking, and 5% of the negative responses criticized the host institution for not coordinating its research well. Issues of coordination, networking and duty division arise continually in EVIS comments on project management.

Lessons Learned: Host technical support

- ▶ the quality of a host institution's staff and its equipment are the two central variables for the adequate provision of technical support.
- ▶ strategic coordination and networking with other researchers and institutions can bolster a host's ability to provide better technical support.

1.4 Donor Administration and Management

Question 3.05 Were the donor's administrative and management procedures appropriate?

YES: 17 35 %
 NO: 25 52 %
 Y/N: 6 13 %

Total: 48 31 % of all EVIS reports

Table 4. EVIS Question 3.05: Donor administration and management

N=48

Main themes in comments on "Were the donor's administrative and management procedures appropriate?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
finances and funding	52	(12)	52	(16)
reporting	39	(9)	23	(7)
monitoring and evaluation	22	(5)	23	(7)
procurement	9	(2)	19	(6)
other				
IDRC personnel	17	(4)		
time consuming processes for application and decision making			6	(2)

As seen above, only 31% of all EVIS reports had answers to this question. Significantly, **question 3.05 is the only one among the nine analyzed for this report in which negative responses outnumber the positive ones.** Both positive and negative answers clustered around the 4 general themes listed in Table 4: finances and funding, reporting, monitoring, and procurement. A significant number of positive responses also had to do with IDRC personnel, while a number of negative responses dealt with inefficient IDRC processes. Issues which arise within these categories are discussed below.

finances and funding: The majority of responses, both positive and negative remarked on how IDRC administered and managed its funding to Southern researchers and institutions. The following is a list of the positive and negative aspects of finances and funding mentioned by evaluators:

Concerns about funding and finances outweighed any other category of comments in question 3.05.

positive aspects

- ▲ providing funds directly to researcher or institutions; avoiding intermediary organizations which take time and cause hassles
- ▲ flexibility
- ▲ timeliness

negative aspects

- ▲ inconsistency
- ▲ not being transparent: unilaterally changing budgets, or not allowing recipients to make changes without hassle;
- ▲ administrative delays in receiving funding
- ▲ losses due to transaction time and inflation
- ▲ lack of coordination of funding with local conditions (fiscal years, harvest times)
- ▲ funding becoming ineffective because used for general support, not earmarked for quantifiable results.

reporting: IDRC's requirements for reporting received positive comments from 39% of the *Yes* answers. Evaluations stated that reporting requirements served to motivate recipients to compile and analyze their progress and findings. Of the *No* answers, EVIS data criticized IDRC for having weak reporting mechanisms, failing to properly define project activities, and failing to provide feedback on the final reports received.

monitoring and evaluation: M&E activities were noted in both positive and negative responses as well. While the positive responses were fairly general in stating that IDRC effectively monitored the project, or personnel visits had positive impacts, the negative comments were often more specific. Some suggested that IDRC should have more well-developed schemas for monitoring and evaluation. This was mentioned in two reports, the most recent from 1990:

An apparent weakness in IDRC's Project Summary is the lack of proper definition of activities. Activities should be defined in a manner such that they have a schedule for completion, are budgetable, have an outcome or products, and are amenable to measurement and reporting of progress.⁵

One of the key benefits of such systematic approaches is that it makes monitoring and evaluation easier. In other comments, an evaluator argued that although IDRC aimed to cut down on monitoring costs by embarking on a large-scale integrated project, the initiative actually required more monitoring than if it were divided into separate smaller initiatives. Finally, two suggested that IDRC

although IDRC aimed to cut down on monitoring costs by embarking on a large-scale integrated project, the initiative actually required more monitoring than if it were divided into separate smaller initiatives.

should do a better job of following-up on projects and keeping in closer contact with award recipients.

procurement: Again, the comments on IDRC's procedures for procurement were much more specific when negative than positive. Suggestions for improvement included that IDRC should not expect host institutions to procure equipment for IDRC-sponsored projects themselves, at least in some countries. As one older report explained,

There are continuous problems with the purchase of foreign items because it is difficult to obtain clearance for foreign exchange expenditures; suppliers are reluctant to ship supplies to Ethiopia; agricultural research equipment has low priority for customs clearance and handling. In some cases, it may be expedient for IDRC to purchase equipment on foreign markets.⁶

While IDRC takes steps to avoid such problems now, other answers spoke of equipment not being granted or not received on time. Hosts appreciate prompt and reliable delivery of project equipment by IDRC.

other: Four positive responses made direct references to IDRC personnel who did well in project administration and management. One spoke of good relations between IDRC personnel and Southern researchers and three mentioned particularly helpful Program Officers. Finally, two other comments among the *No* answers are worthy of note: both refer to IDRC applications and decision-making procedures which are considered to be too time consuming. These had to do with a small grants funding program and the proposal for the Young Canadian Researchers awards.

Lessons Learned: Donor administration and management

- ▶ Financial relations with hosts improve when
 - > IDRC policies are transparent and consistent,
 - > funding is provided up-front and direct, and
 - > losses due to transaction times and exchange rates are minimized.
- ▶ Having well-defined designs makes projects easier to measure and therefore to monitor and evaluate.
- ▶ Ensure timely and reliable provision of necessary equipment.

1.5 Donor's Technical Support

Question 3.06 Was the donor's technical support adequate?

YES:	26	44%
NO:	21	36%
Y/N:	12	20%
Total:	59	38%

Table 5. EVIS Question 3.06: Donor's technical support

N=59

Main themes in comments on "Was the donor's technical support adequate?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
IDRC staff	32	(12)	30	(10)
monitoring	21	(8)	24	(8)
consultants	18	(7)	24	(8)
training	11	(4)	18	(6)
provision of equipment	11	(4)	15	(5)

There are 59 answers to EVIS question 3.06 regarding whether IDRC provided adequate technical support. The answers can be roughly grouped along the five themes, as in Table 5: IDRC staff, monitoring, consultants, training and provision of equipment. The comments covered by these themes are examined in greater detail below.

IDRC staff: As with EVIS questions on host project management, staff was the most common theme in the comments of question 3.06. The value of IDRC's technical support for initiatives was often assessed in terms of IDRC staff members' skills, coordinating and networking. Of the 38 *Yes* answers in the 3.06 data set, 32% praised IDRC staff's good networking and coordinating abilities; their helpful comments and training on professional, administrative, institution building and project design issues; and their encouragement of multidisciplinary research. Among the negative comments, numerous suggestions are made for IDRC staff:

- ▲ avoid the confusion and set-backs caused by switching Program Officers in the middle of an initiative; reduce such problems by encouraging fuller communication among Centre staff about projects;
- ▲ encourage broad-based contacts with staff people from various levels at host institutions;
- ▲ when requested, provide more assistance in project design, travel arrangements, field logistics, publishing and debriefing; and
- ▲ have one *technical* coordinator (in addition to Program Officers) to monitor complex initiatives.

The issue of promoting better communication among Centre staff was the only suggestion made twice in the negative comments; all other recommendations were made only once.

monitoring: Adequate monitoring of projects ensures that the host's needs for technical support are identified and met. The comments for the *Yes* answers of question 3.06 note that adequate monitoring is aided by regular trips to host institutions and project sites. Other comments suggest that regular reporting mechanisms aid technical monitoring, in addition to site visits:

External technical monitoring by IDRC of individual projects is through the annual technical papers, the six-monthly progress reports, and visits by the IDRC program officers to the individual projects at the time of the Liaison Committee meetings. All parties appear to be satisfied with the level of external technical monitoring.⁷

The negative comments give more specific information on what creates inadequate monitoring. The majority also suggested that more and longer visits by IDRC Program Officers would help monitoring problems. Others suggested implementing a more structured review mechanism to ensure adequate, regular monitoring of projects, appointing one overall program monitor, and having someone other than the Program Officer act as project monitor.

consultants: Technical support for IDRC initiatives is often provided through consultants. The positive impact of consultants was noted by 18% of the answers stating that IDRC provided adequate technical support. One in particular noted that the importance of the consultant diminished as the host institution became more capable in the technical aspects of the initiative, which was a good development in terms of building research capacity.⁸ Among the comments from the *No* answers, evaluators suggested some projects would benefit from an extended presence of outside technical consultants. In other cases, the consultants chosen were inappropriate matches for the needs of the host institution. A final comment called for better management of visiting consultants' time.

training: The technical support provided by IDRC in many cases included a component for training host institution staff in order to make them more technically competent. However, some of the negative responses included references to projects in which necessary training was lacking, or that the training given was irrelevant or unfocused.

equipment: A final aspect of technical support which was mentioned in both the positive and negative answers was the equipment received by the host institution for the project to be undertaken. Some of the positive answers enumerated the types of equipment which were obtained for the running of the project. Among the negative answers, some evaluators commented on there not being enough equipment to support the IDRC-funded initiative; host institutions lacked vehicles and spare parts, materials for their library, computers, or audio-visual equipment. As in 3.05, procurement and provision of equipment are significant issues in the comments about IDRC's technical support.

Lessons Learned: Donor technical support

- ▶ Better communication among Centre staff could reduce confusion and set-backs when an initiative is transferred from one P.O. to the next.
- ▶ IDRC staff are good at networking and coordinating.
- ▶ P.O.s should encourage broader-based, multi-layered links between host and Centre staff members.
- ▶ Monitoring alternatives should be considered:
 - > technical monitors
 - > overall program monitors
 - > someone other than the P.O. to monitor projects.
- ▶ Outlining project objectives and activities more specifically makes for easier monitoring in some cases.
- ▶ IDRC should take pains to ensure necessary equipment is successfully procured for its partner institutions.

1.6 Donor's method of operation

Question 3.08 Was the donor's "method" of operation acceptable?

YES: 30 61 %
 NO: 12 24 %
 Y/N: 7 14 %

Total: 49 31 % of EVIS reports

Table 6. EVIS Question 3.08: Donor's method of operation

N=49

Main themes in comments on "Was the donor's method of operation acceptable?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
IDRC's philosophy and approach to RfD flexibility	30	(11)	5	(1)
responsiveness	22	(8)	10	(2)
modes of funding and management	22	(8)	58	(11)
IDRC staff	24	(9)	5	(1)
roles of Centre and staff clearly defined	24		16	(3)

49 EVIS reports answered question 3.08: Was the donor's "method" of operation acceptable? The majority of answers were positive. In fact, **the 61% Yes response rate is the highest among the questions analyzed in this report** (tied with question 4.02, see below). The most common positive comments had to do with IDRC's approach to research and partnerships with Southern researchers. The comments encourage IDRC to maintain its traditional philosophy and flexibility in supporting research for development. Among the negative responses, there were many criticisms and suggestions for improvements. Over half of the negative responses centred on problems with how funding was allotted to institutions and researchers, and how projects were managed. The categories, shown in Table 6, are discussed in further detail below.

philosophy and approach: Comments on IDRC's approach to supporting research constituted the largest category of positive responses to this question. Evaluators remarked that IDRC's philosophy of aiding Southern researchers to work on their own priority issues was very much appreciated by partners. Several noted IDRC's "backstopping" approach, providing support and some direction where needed, but not continually interfering with the research. As one evaluator noted:

IDRC's philosophy and "backstopping" approach to supporting research for development is heartily applauded by evaluators and Southern partners.

It is very important for the Centre to maintain its philosophy of not pushing pre-ordained packages of assistance on to recipients.⁹

The only negative comment on IDRC's approach to research was noted with regard to a networking project, in which the evaluator thought that IDRC was being too possessive and controlling of the network.¹⁰ Taken with the positive comments on this topic, it seems that in this one case, IDRC was being inconsistent with its general method of operation. Thus, when IDRC remained consistent, its philosophy and approach to supporting research for development was heartily applauded by evaluators and Southern partners.

flexibility: IDRC's philosophy demands flexibility in the types of projects undertaken, methods used, and degrees and modes of support given to individual initiatives. Such flexibility increases the chances that IDRC-supported initiatives will be appropriate in their contexts. IDRC was seen as flexible and responsive to its partners' and recipients' requests; this was especially apparent to recipients when IDRC would support hosts' ideas for improving projects.

The relationship between the Andean Pact and the Centre remained cordial. The level of trust and freedom was appreciated by the recipient team. Tribute was paid to IDRC administration for its flexible approach and willingness to consider changes in the project.¹¹

... The flexibility of IDRC in allowing a team to redirect research emphasis is commendable.¹²

The two negative comments in this category again pointed to what seem to be inconsistencies with IDRC's regular flexibility and responsiveness. One report commented that IDRC was inflexible about the use of its funding, and another argued that the recipient needed more training, technical and administrative support than IDRC would give.

IDRC funds initiatives through a variety of channels: to individual researchers, to institutions, to networks, by project or by program. Similarly, it uses a variety of people and bodies to oversee its activities: Program Officers and leaders, steering committees, international boards, etc. While there were a number of positive responses which commented on an appropriate mode being used for an initiative, this category contained the majority of negative comments in this set of answers (see Table 6). It is interesting that while some positive and negative comments remarked on the same mode of funding or management, different evaluations came to opposite conclusions about the benefits or constraints of that mode. For instance, some of the negative responses suggested IDRC fund only large, long-term projects in order to promote sustained institution-building; however, one positive response suggested that small grants were an extremely important mechanism for researchers. The conclusion that emerged from these comments is that *no one mode is appropriate for all projects, and that IDRC will have to continue to be flexible, using the mode which is most appropriate for the researchers, institutions, and networks involved in an initiative.*

Many of the negative responses contained other suggestions for improving IDRC's management of initiatives. Two suggested the need for regulated mechanisms for monitoring and supervision. Others thought IDRC should facilitate more opportunities for isolated research groups to twin with others, and another suggested IDRC should link its payments to reporting mechanisms. In keeping with the second theme in 3.08 comments, a degree of flexibility in choosing modes of funding and management for an initiative can ensure that IDRC uses appropriate methods of operation.

IDRC staff: Good relations between IDRC staff and Southern researchers and institutions help maintain smooth operations. Six of the positive responses commented on IDRC having a relationship of trust and goodwill with its partners, of being well coordinated and cooperative with the host institution and of IDRC staff being accessible and helpful. The one *No* answer which fell in this category was from an evaluation done in 1977 which mentioned there being some tensions between IDRC and host institution staff due to "the cultural nuances in administrative relationships"¹³. From the more numerous and quite positive comments in the *Yes* answers, it seems that IDRC has since developed more sensitivity in its working relationships.

Three of the *Yes* answers to question 3.08 commented specifically on the Program Officer making contributions to IDRC's method of operation. One commented on the officer's ability to overcome bureaucratic obstacles. Another report commended a Program Officer for being knowledgeable, sympathetic and interested. Finally, one remarked on the ability of Program Officers to open links among researchers and institutions. None of the *No* answers made specific comments on program officers.

clarity of roles: Although no positive comments were made about the roles of either the Centre or its staff being particularly clear and/or the usefulness of this clarity, three of the negative responses mentioned role divisions. The comments suggested that *it is important for the Centre to clearly outline the role it wishes to take and contribution it proposes to make in an initiative*, and to do the same for its employees involved. This issue of role division and coordination emerged at several points in the discussion on project management.

Lessons Learned: Donor's method of operation

- ▶ Partners appreciate IDRC's policy of supporting Southern research interests and IDRC's "backstopping", or low interference, approach.
- ▶ IDRC should continue to be flexible in choosing appropriate modes of funding and management for individual initiatives, responding to the specific conditions of the institution and its environment.
- ▶ Because there has been some trouble in the past about which party would take responsibility for aspects of initiatives, the Centre should clearly outline the role it wishes to take when designing a new project with a partner.

1.7 Conclusion: Project Management

From this analysis of the EVIS data on project management, several key points emerge:

First, **staff** is a crucial factor for both donor and host institutions in project management. Staff issues emerged as significant themes in every one of the five questions analyzed in this section. They were the major preoccupation of comments on hosts' administration, management and technical support, as well as technical support by IDRC. Qualified, coordinated, team-oriented staff people are essential for project management. Many individuals from IDRC and host institutions were singled out as exemplary within evaluation reports. The predominance of comments on staff underlines the fact that, while IDRC's focus on institutions and institutional capacity building is important, one must not forget that individual staff persons and the way they are managed are key to whether the institution will be effective or not.

Second, the **infrastructure** of an institution is important. Its *organizational and management structure* is critical for project administration and management, as well as its technical *facilities*: equipment, computer facilities, library and information services, etc.

Another central theme in EVIS data was the importance of **coordinating research and networking** with others. Coordinating and networking were mentioned as ways in which hosts can improve their technical support of initiatives, and IDRC personnel were praised for their abilities in facilitating networking in many initiatives. However, while networking and collaborating were encouraged, evaluators pointed out that many institutions and IDRC as well often had problems with coordinating their duties, and clearly defining their respective roles in initiatives.

One of the benefits of having clearly divided duties and responsibilities comes in terms of **monitoring and evaluation**. Some evaluators insisted that monitoring would be easier if projects would be divided up into clearly identifiable and therefore, easily tracked, sub-components. Others suggested IDRC should consider different arrangements for monitoring, such as appointing a *program monitor* to supervise the various initiatives within a given program, instituting *technical monitors* where needed, or having someone other than the Program Officer act as project monitor. While evaluators remarked on host institutions' roles in monitoring and evaluation, the majority of comments on this topic referred to IDRC's responsibilities. Evaluators argued that initiatives would do better if IDRC personnel would keep in closer and more regular contact with host institutions to monitor their progress. Overall, the data suggest that project monitoring is an important area of general concern requiring attention at the corporate level. As different solutions were suggested for different situations, more focussed study of this issue could identify the range of actions needed to improve Centre monitoring. Such a review would be most timely, as IDRC is making major changes in its mode of operations.

It seems that issues of **budgeting** will always be a sensitive area between donors and recipients. The EVIS data show that evaluators were concerned about many aspects of financial issues,

including how well the host managed its budget, how IDRC administered its funding, and whether the mode of financing chosen for an initiative was appropriate. While IDRC's partners appreciated the direct transmission of funds, and the many occasions when they received money on time and without hassle, they complained of other times when IDRC was inconsistent or late in sending funds, or did not allow them the freedom to modify budgets. IDRC could consider how its approach to funding and financing facilitates research for development or frustrates its Southern partners.

Finally, **flexibility** was a recurrent theme in the EVIS data. Host institutions seemed to do better at administration and management if they could allow for some flexibility in their management structure. At IDRC, there is a measure of flexibility inherent in IDRC's philosophy and approach to research for development; the Centre does set its own development agenda, but facilitates Southerners' pursuit of their own priorities. Program Officers also coordinate different types of funding and management arrangements, aiming to respond appropriately to a multitude of contexts. The overwhelming evidence from question 3.08 is that IDRC's partners appreciate this flexibility.

A disturbing finding from the EVIS data concerns the lack of critical evaluation of IDRC's side of project management. Evaluators tended to focus primarily on the host institution. This is problematic, for there are a number of areas in which IDRC could improve its performance. This became obvious especially in question 3.05 in which negative comments about IDRC's technical support outnumbered positive ones -- the only question analyzed where *No*'s outweighed *Yes*'s. On the other hand, the question regarding IDRC's "method of operation" received the highest percentage of unequivocal *Yes* answers among the nine questions analyzed in this report. Thus, although IDRC seemed to have a good overall approach to research and generally had positive interactions with host institutions, there were many specific tasks in project management in which the Centre could improve. It would be useful to require evaluators to provide critiques of IDRC's performance when assessing IDRC-supported initiatives.

2. Capacity Building

Four EVIS questions on capacity building are analyzed in this report, having to do with training, sustainability and institutional or research capacity. The questions are listed in Table 7.

Table 7. EVIS questions regarding capacity building

#	Question	% of reports with answers
4.02	Were training objectives met?	66
4.03	Generally, was research and/or institutional capacity improved?	62
4.10	As a result of the initiative, did the host institution become more sustaining?	36
5.02	Did the report comment on institution strengthening?	100

2.1 Overview

The number of EVIS reports which answer these questions vary, with the first two being 66% and 62% respectively. Only 36% of the reports answered question 4.10, which is perhaps due to the vague nature of the question's wording. The last question in Table 7 is from the fifth section of EVIS, in which all questions have the same format: "Did the report comment on...?". All EVIS reports have *Yes* or *No* answers to these questions, including 5.02.

The general conclusions reached in this section are as follows:

- ▲ Among the initiatives reported in EVIS, the majority were assessed as having met their training objectives, and having improved research or institutional capacity. These two issues are closely linked, of course, for many comments to question 4.03 (on capacity building) cited effective training as bringing about the improvement.
- ▲ Most of the respondents to question 4.10 interpreted "sustaining" to refer to the host institution's funding arrangements; stable funding meant the host became more sustaining, while financial insecurity or dependence meant it did not. A few answers interpreted "sustaining" to also refer to institutional capacity in terms of management skills or infrastructure development, but these were a small minority.
- ▲ When adding the *Y/N* comments in with the straight *Yes*'s and *No*'s, the message emerges that there is approximately a 50/50 chance that after an IDRC project, a host institution will be assessed as being more sustaining.

Overall, the answers to the four questions analyzed point to the conclusion that **IDRC initiatives did well in developing the capacity of its partners**. The comments to each of the questions are analyzed in detail in the pages which follow.

2.2 Achievement of Training Objectives

Question 4.02 Were training objectives met?

YES: 63 61 %
 NO: 8 8 %
 Y/N: 32 31 %

Total: 103 66% of all EVIS reports

Table 8. EVIS Question 4.02: Achieving training objectives

N = 103

Main themes in comments on "Were training objectives met?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
training taken/given	50	(47)	57	(22)
skills	7	(7)	10	(4)
evidence of success				
academic degrees attained	12	(11)		
trainees receive funding, scholarships or awards	13	(12)		
other				
students returned home after receiving training abroad	1	(1)	5	(2)
women likely to receive technical training			2	(1)

EVIS question 4.02 asks, "Were training objectives met?" 61% of the 103 answers stated that yes, the training objectives were met, 8% said they were not, and 31% stated that some aspects of the objectives were met, while others were not. **This question has the highest percentage of Yes's coupled with the lowest percentage of No's of any question analyzed; most IDRC initiatives evaluated succeeded in promoting training.** The comments in the responses revolved around four themes: training taken/given, skills, evidence of success and other. These themes are expanded further below.

training taken/given: As shown in Table 8, half of the YES answers and over half of the NO answers included comments outlining types of training supported, the number of trainees supported, etc. Of the positive responses, 34% included information on courses run, workshops taken, and on-the-job training given or received. However, of the negative responses, 8% stated that fewer students graduated than anticipated, or that funds earmarked for training were not used.

Of the *Yes* responses, another 16% emphasized informal types of training which occurred throughout the project. These referred to training through the very act of working on the project, training through extension services, mixing junior researchers with senior personnel on teams, and taking study tours.

It should be underscored that GRADE has associated to its projects many young economists. Work there has awoken [sic] a lasting interest in research in many young graduates... The funding of the [Economic Research] Consortium has allowed stages and short sojourns of junior researchers. DESCO supports a small workshop in international economic relations and in economic development.¹⁴

No EVIS answers contained negative comments on informal training. Moreover, among the negative responses, 10% suggested that training did not constitute a significant enough emphasis in the IDRC-supported initiative under evaluation.

The largest number of negative responses in this theme had to do with the quality of training given or received, especially the content of courses or workshops. Problems included courses not including enough training, some being too inflexible to be appropriate for local needs, some missing important topics, and others generally being of questionable benefit and in need of revamping. No positive comments to question 4.02 delved into the quality of courses.

skills: Training generally aims at producing skills which can be usefully employed. In 7% of the positive responses, evaluators commented that trainees implemented the skills they acquired into their work. However, 10% of the negative responses suggested that skills were not implemented, that courses were impractical, or that training lacked appropriate extension activities.

evidence of success: One quarter of the *Yes* answers gave evidence of the value of training received through individuals' participation in IDRC initiatives. 12% of the *Yes* answers referred to people receiving academic degrees based directly or indirectly on their work with IDRC, or attaining them with the support of IDRC funding.

Academic qualifications of researchers in some projects were upgraded through project funding. The initiatives helped to create new researchers by providing opportunities for fresh graduates to be trained. Short courses at IRRI helped researchers gain more experience in designing equipment. Several PhD and Masters degrees were acquired through the projects. In one project alone, 59 students were hired as part-time trainees.¹⁵

Another 13% remarked on people associated with IDRC projects receiving funding for schooling, scholarships or other academic and technical awards.

other: A few other comments in this set of answers stand out. Of the negative responses, 5% commented on the problem of students sent abroad for training who decided not to return to their home countries. Thus, the IDRC-supported training was contributing to brain drain. On the other hand, one positive answer claimed that the number of people who returned home after social science training in the U.S. was "unbelievably high"¹⁶. Finally, one negative response pointed out a gender variable in training: women had fewer opportunities to receive training or to learn the technical aspects of the *Three Strata Forage Systems* initiative in Indonesia¹⁷. Both brain drain and gender inequities are issues IDRC must continually address in its training initiatives.

Lessons Learned: Meeting training objectives

- ▶ Evaluations show that most IDRC projects meet their training objectives.
- ▶ Informal training works, including mixing junior and senior researchers on teams, and taking study tours.
- ▶ Formal training works when the curriculum is comprehensive, but also flexible enough to adapt to local needs and circumstances.
- ▶ Evaluators value practical over theoretical training.

2.3 Research / Institutional Capacity

Question 4.03 Generally, was research and/or institutional capacity improved?

YES: 56 57%
 NO: 17 17%
 Y/N: 25 26%

Total: 98 62% of all EVIS reports

Table 9. EVIS Question 4.02: Research / institutional capacity

N=98

Main themes in comments on "Generally, was research and/or institutional capacity improved?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
training	44	(36)	14	(6)
project design and implementation	19	(15)	19	(8)
science and technology				
scientific or technological advances made through the project	10	(8)		
institution gained new facilities, labs or computers	6	(5)		
personnel:				
staff			19	(8)
foreign consultants			7	(3)
networking	7	(6)	5	(2)

98 EVIS reports have responses to question 4.03, "Generally, was research and/or institutional capacity improved?" Of these, 57% answered *Yes*, 17% answered *No*, and 26% answered *Y/N*. Thus, there were 81 positive responses and 42 negative responses in the set. **The high percentage of *Yes* answers suggest that IDRC initiatives do contribute to research and institutional capacity improvement.** Unfortunately, many of the negative comments do not fit easily into this analysis: 24% did not fit into broader categories or were too project-specific to be incorporated into this analysis. Another 17% were so general (statements like "It is unlikely that AIT was strengthened as an institution to any significant degree by this project."¹⁸) that they

were not included either; 12% of the positive answers were also too general to include. The answers which were more amenable to analysis are categorized along four themes: training, project design and implementation, science and technology, and personnel.

training: Training was a component of both negative and positive responses. Of the positive responses, 44% stated that capacity was increased due to training and general human resource development. These answers included references to all types of training, from technical to project management. Evaluators differed on whether training individuals leads to improved institutional capacity:

There is a clear understanding and a very positive appreciation of the AERC [African Economic Research Consortium] system for supporting the development of economic research in Africa... While AERC grants are primarily given to individuals to support their research activities (apart from a few small, but important institutional grants for equipment, literature and the like) it is evident that this is an efficient way of supporting the teaching and research institutions to which most of these economists are attached.¹⁹

Concern also has been expressed that too often the [Pearson] fellowship, while beneficial to the individuals, does not have the positive impact it might on the institutions to which they return... The university personnel involved with the Pearson Fellowship Program in its current form do not see the program as a means to develop research capacity.²⁰

These answers suggest that while it is possible that training individuals may lead to institutional capacity building, the first does not guarantee the second. Of the other negative responses, a number claimed that training was ineffective, fruitless or inadequate for building capacity.

project design and implementation: 19% of the positive responses stated that through the project, researchers developed their skills in project management, implementation, methodology, and multidisciplinary. On the other hand, 10% of the negative responses stated that the project was just too short to affect any capacity building. Two reports mentioned that institutions had continual problems with priority setting.

science and technology: Among the positive responses, 16% mentioned increases in capacity for science and technology. The majority of those responses mentioned the pieces of technology, or advances in scientific approaches which were developed through the initiative. One in particular mentioned an institution gaining internet access as a significant development in capacity.²¹ Other comments dealt with institutions gaining new facilities, labs or computers, which strengthened their capacity.

personnel: Problems with staff hampered institutional and research capacity development in 19% of the negative responses:

- ° research teams fell apart
- ° teams failed to take responsibility
- ° lack of indigenous resource management.
- ° staff were overextended already
- ° staff were under-qualified

7% of the negative responses argued that foreign consultants or other people from outside the institution did so much of the work on the initiative that the institution did not have the chance to improve its capacity to any appreciable extent.

networking: Finally, the issue of networking came up in this set of answers. In 7% of the positive answers, evaluators noted that researchers, groups and institutions benefitted enormously from making linkages with others pursuing similar topics. They shared skills, information, and methods, and built one another's confidence through such networking.

There appears to be no question that the network has helped to increase the capacity of the NARS (National Agricultural Research Systems) to generate root crops technology... In general most countries now have sufficient core staff which can carry the program, and their efforts appear to be enhanced considerably by the network.²²

Two of the negative answers suggested that institutional and research capacity could improve if more use was made of networking options.

Lessons Learned: Research/institutional capacity

- ▶ Though comments implicitly suggested that training leads to capacity improvement, one evaluator questioned the assumption that training individuals builds *institutional* capacity.
- ▶ IDRC projects have affected capacity development mostly in the areas of project management and implementation, methodology and multidisciplinary.
- ▶ Longer projects have greater impact on capacity building than shorter ones.
- ▶ Consultants and IDRC staff should avoid taking on so much of an initiative that they block capacity development in host institutions.
- ▶ Networking can be very helpful toward capacity building.

2.4 Sustainability

Question 4.10 As a result of the initiative, did the host institution become more sustaining?

YES:	24	43 %
NO:	22	39 %
Y/N:	10	18 %

Total: 56 36% of all EVIS reports

Table 10. EVIS Question 4.10: Sustainability

N=56

Main themes in comments on "As a result of the initiative, did the host institution become more sustaining?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers		occurrence of theme in NO answers	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
financial	91	(31)	91	(29)
non-financial	26	(9)	16	(5)

EVIS question 4.10 asks, "As a result of the initiative, did the host institution become more sustaining?" 43% of the answers stated that *Yes*, the institution did become more sustaining, 39% said *No*, and 18% responded with a *Y/N*. The comments divided up into two categories: financial and non-financial.

financial: As is seen in Table 10, 91% of both the *Yes* and the *No* answers commented on the institution's funding arrangements as evidence of sustainability. "More sustaining" institutions arranged to get funding from other national agencies, from other international donors, from consulting contracts, or from collecting fees for their services. Some institutions assumed the costs of continuing the IDRC-supported initiative within their own budgets after IDRC funding stopped. The *No* comments which dealt with financial sustainability referred to institutions failing to diversify their sources of funding. However, one evaluation report pointed out that alternative revenue generation can have negative aspects:

The IDRC contribution is decreasing or has stopped for several professional staff members, and there has not been a satisfactory, or secure replacement. Necessary resources, now amounting to 20% of the budget, are raised by engaging in consulting activities which while they make it possible to pay the bills and survive, have the undesirable effect of leading the Centre away from its academic mission.²³

Other institutions were criticized for not implementing cost-recovery schemes into their operations or not assuming project costs within their own budgets. In other cases, the national economic situation was just so unstable that funding from any national source seemed unlikely. Financial issues clearly dominated the EVIS data for question 4.10.

non-financial: Although small in number, the answers which covered non-financial answers in this question mentioned numerous issues. Among the positive responses, comments suggested that institutions became more sustaining as they gained in prestige and recognition. Others had hired more staff, or computerized their facilities in order to take on extra and more complex projects. Others became more technically competent, and therefore less dependent on the support of regional organizations. Finally, another developed its institutional structure, including physical equipment and employee organization. Of the negative comments, non-financial issues included research centres working in an "institutional vacuum", being hindered by an unstable staff, or trying to manoeuvre in an unreceptive policy environment. These factors contributed to the degree of sustainability achieved in the host institution.

the evolution of definitions: In total, 75% of the answers interpreted sustainability solely in financial terms. 9% of the answers spoke only of non-financial matters (reputation, staff, environment and facilities), and 14% referred to both financial and non-financial issues. In recent years, the term "sustainability" has broadened considerably in meaning. Now, in some circles, it refers primarily to environmental considerations^{**}; in others, it encompasses many different factors (social, political, economic, environmental, cultural). According to the 1992 *Data Analyst Guide* for EVIS, question 4.10 used to be worded "As a result of the initiative, did the host institution become more financially self-sustaining?" and was meant to be interpreted to cover the following questions:

As a result of the initiative was the host institution able to generate new or additional funds from other donor agencies? from other local sources? Was it able to generate revenues through any type of contract research? by marketing a new technology? by attracting new trainees?

However, an analysis of the EVIS data and the present wording of question 4.10 gives some sense of the evolution of "sustaining" from strictly financial considerations to include non-financial criteria as well:

Table 11. Changes in definition of "sustaining" over time in comments to Question 4.10

N = 56

year evaluation completed	only financial criteria used		only non-financial criteria used		both financial and non-financial	
	%	(#)	%	(#)	%	(#)
1975-1979	100	(8)	0	(0)	0	(0)
1980-1984	75	(9)	0	(0)	25	(3)
1985-1989	80	(16)	10	(2)	10	(2)
1990-1994	64	(9)	21	(3)	14	(2)

Although Table 11 shows that there has been a growing trend toward including non-financial considerations in assessments of institutional sustainability since the early 1980s, it is clear that financial considerations continue to predominate today. EVIS reports of 65% of evaluations completed since 1990 still refer only to financial matters when discussing institutional sustainability. The increasing prevalence of non-financial criteria might point to either changes in the evaluation report's discussion of sustainability, or to different understandings of sustainability used by those who input data into EVIS.

Lessons Learned: Sustainability

- IDRC should encourage financial diversification as a means for hosts to become financially secure:

^{**} There was no mention of a host institution becoming more sustaining due to it adopting environmentally sensitive modes of operation. None of the comments to question 4.10 referred to environmental issues at all.

- diversify their funding sources with other international or national donors
 - take on consulting contracts
 - charge fees for their services.
- ▶ A host's degree of sustainability is also increased by non-financial attributes, including:
 - its reputation
 - its staff and facilities
 - its policy environment
 - linkages and relations with other institutions.

2.5 Comments on Institution Strengthening

Question 5.02 Did the report comment on institution strengthening?

YES: 25 16%

NO: 132 84%

Total: 157 100%

Table 12. EVIS Question 5.02: Institution strengthening

N=25

Main themes in comments on "Did the report comment on institution strengthening?"	occurrence of theme in YES answers	
	%	(#)
no comments given	52	(13)
research capacity	24	(6)
networking among researchers and their institutions	12	(3)
other	12	(3)

Question 5.02 in EVIS asks if the evaluation report comments on institution strengthening. Although institution strengthening and sustainability, capacity building and training are all closely related^{***}, the data on EVIS for these questions are not as similar as one might expect. While there are 98 answers on research/institutional capacity improvement (4.03) and 56 on institutions becoming more sustaining (4.10), the short answers to question 5.02 suggest that only 25 EVIS reports comment institution strengthening. If one were to look only at the answers to question 5.02, one would be left with the impression that only 16% of all evaluation reports on EVIS mentioned anything to do with institution strengthening. Given the higher rates of responses to other related questions, the data from 5.02 must be misleading. Perhaps problems lie in the phrasing of 5.02 or its explanation in the *Data Analyst Guide*, or perhaps those

^{**} The data analyst guide explains that Question 5.02 should cover all of the following aspects: "What types of support help and hinder building institutional capacity? Does training play a role? the provision of operating funds? linkages with other institutions? What is the relative importance of administrative, financial, technical and communications support?" (*OPEIS Data Analyst Guide* May 1992: 49)

inputting data into EVIS avoided repeating answers already provided elsewhere.

Another problem with this question is that, of the 25 *Yes* answers, only 12 are accompanied by text from the report (see Table 12). The other 13 positive responses tell the reader that yes, the report did comment on institution strengthening, but *what* the report said is not given. (Since a *No* answer means that the evaluation report did not comment on institution strengthening, there are obviously no long answers for the *No*'s.) However, despite these problems with the 5.02 answers, there is some useful information in those note fields which did include comments. The comments reinforce the themes which emerged from other questions having to do with capacity building: individual/team building, networking, and some others.

research capacity: 24% of the answers referred to institutions being strengthened through improved research capacity. The training and education components assisted in this regard, as did the simple fact that individuals received grants to continue their research. One answer commented on the psychological impact of receiving funding:

The greatest praise was reserved for the psychological impact that AERC [African Economic Research Consortium] has had upon its participants, in many cases restoring them to constructive functioning within the economics professions after years of discouragement and inertia.²⁴

Finally, one answer described a consultant spending much of his time doing capacity building among a team of researchers. Building research capacity is obviously a key part of IDRC's aims in institution strengthening.

networking: 12% of the *Yes* answers spoke of institution strengthening through networking. Networks strengthened national crop programs, individual researchers and their organizations. However, in another comment, a network failed to strengthen institutions because the mechanisms of the computer linkages were too expensive and required too much effort from the members to maintain it. Obviously, networks must be reasonably easy to keep up, or members will let them disintegrate.

other: Three answers are left in this set of comments on institution building. One mentioned an institution being strengthened through the receipt of funding from other donors. Another project strengthened an institution by expanding its research approach from 2D: diagnosis and design, to include a third D, delivery, as well. The last simply gave a definition of institution strengthening:

... institution building involves, inter alia, the building up of the capacity of an organization to perform its existing functions better and to take on new functions in a self sustaining manner. Instituion [sic] building includes some or all of: engaging additional staff; training existing and additional staff; providing resources such as money, buildings, vehicles and equipment; and providing outside technical assistance.²⁵

2.6 Conclusion: Capacity Building

From the data in questions 4.02, 4.03, 4.10 and 5.02 on the EVIS database, we can make several conclusions regarding IDRC's past experience in capacity building. While there were numerous criticisms of both IDRC's and host institutions' performances in project management, it seems that *despite some problems in process, very positive results were achieved in capacity building*.

First, EVIS data shows that **the IDRC initiatives assessed succeeded in achieving their training objectives and improving research and institutional capacity**. Through formal and informal training, people gained useful skills, attained academic degrees and received other funding to continue their studies. Capacity building was seen most in project management and implementation, methodology and multidisciplinary. Questions 4.02 and 4.03 had the two highest percentages of positive responses of all the questions analyzed in this report.

Within training initiatives, IDRC should take pains to avoid perennial problems such as **brain drain** and **gender-based exclusion**.

One evaluator raised the issue of **whether training individuals automatically leads to institutional capacity building**. Unfortunately, doing a cross-tabulation between questions 4.02 and 4.03 does not provide a definitive answer to this question. The number of No answers in 4.02 is too low to provide an adequate sample size, and the answers to question 4.03 are not readily disaggregated into institutional versus research capacity improvement. The link between individual training and institutional capacity remains open to question.

Some evaluators maintained that in order to achieve greater impact in capacity building among recipients, IDRC should undertake **longer-term initiatives**.

Regarding **finances**, institutions benefit from becoming more financially secure, either by arranging longer-term and diversified financing from a variety of donors, through cost-recovery by selling services or taking on consulting contracts. In some cases, IDRC should expect to have its funding "locked in" for a longer time where a national economic situation renders other funding options for an institution not feasible.

The connotations of the word "sustaining" have changed over the past 20 years, so it is interesting to see how question 4.10 has been interpreted, both by those entering EVIS data and in the *Data Analyst Guide*. As was seen in Table 10, 91% of both the *Yes* and the *No* comments referred to financial sustainability. Although there is a growing trend to include issues other than budgeting and fundraising, the data show that still after 1990, 64% of EVIS reports which assessed institutional sustainability included only financial criteria. It is interesting that although sustainability and capacity building would seem to be closely related issues, the EVIS data for question 4.10 do not overlap substantially with that in questions 4.02 and 4.03. Perhaps this is simply a problem with the *Data Analyst Guide*. However, it also brings out an important issue: *beyond financial criteria, what are requirements for institutional sustainability?*

The positive **psychological impact** of IDRC funding for some Southern researchers should not be underestimated.

The benefits of **networks** came up many times throughout the analysis of EVIS data on both project management and capacity building. However, while networks seemed to work in a variety of different situations, EVIS data contained three cautions about using them. First, networks must be easy to maintain, or members will let them disintegrate. Second, within cooperative networks on project tasks, duties and roles should be clearly defined. Finally, the lesson regarding flexibility from the project management section also applies here: while networks have been useful in many situations, they are not necessarily appropriate for all initiatives.

In conclusion, then, the data on the EVIS system suggests that IDRC initiatives have achieved remarkable success in training and capacity building. As in most EVIS data, different evaluators propose different solutions to obstacles faced in initiatives. This of course does not result in consensus, but rather gives a variety of suggestions for IDRC staff to consider as they browse through the lessons learned through evaluation.

3. Conclusion: Doing Research on EVIS

This report concludes with a few comments about doing analysis from the EVIS database. EVIS can generate both quantitative and qualitative information from previous IDRC project and program evaluations, both of which could be very useful for IDRC staff. EVIS generates numbers by tabulating and cross-tabulating short answers to any question. As was done in this report, one can generate more statistical information through an analysis of the long answers. By examining questions through EVIS, one has the benefit of getting quotations from evaluation reports without having to read through the entire report. One can read through all the questions of a single evaluation report, or tabulate answers across reports. Reading through EVIS data is an efficient way of discovering lessons learned through evaluations of IDRC projects, programs, and partners.

What follows are some suggestions for ways in which EVIS data could be used. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list; individual Program and Research Officers, interns, and others in the Centre will tailor-make their own analyses. However, the suggestions below might provide some ideas. Appendix C contains a number of quick Question and Answer's which can be easily generated through EVIS.

The numerical data generated in EVIS can be used in a variety of ways:

- ▲ Compile *Yes* and *No* answers through EVIS to calculate the percentages of answers with positive or negative comments on issues raised.
- ▲ Identify which issues are most often covered in IDRC evaluations, and which are neglected by tabulating the total number of responses to each question.
- ▲ Examine correlations between issues by using the cross-tabulation functions. For instance, one might ask whether there is a higher incidence of initiatives whose results benefitted users (4.06) among those in which the users played a role in design and implementation (3.04) versus those which they did not. Or one could see if there is a correlation with initiatives in which results were adequately disseminated (4.05) and those whose outcomes benefitted users (4.06).

The comments from EVIS contain a wealth of information from evaluations of IDRC's previous project experience. Reading through quotations on EVIS gives a good indication of the topics covered in the evaluation report. From there, one could either decide to read the report in full, or to cross-reference the issues from one report by looking at the responses to the same question in other EVIS entries. The long answers support the following types of analyses:

- ▲ Select reports according to project type, country, or other category and read relevant sections from those evaluations.

- ▲ If deciding whether to launch an initiative with an institution with which IDRC has worked in the past, check whether any EVIS reports refer to that institution. Read through EVIS answers concerning the host's record in project management, the results of the previous initiative(s), whether the institution had adequate linkages with other organizations and researchers, whether the people involved worked to disseminate the results of the research of the research, and many other issues addressed in the database.
- ▲ As has been done in this report, one could read through the answers to certain questions from all EVIS reports to get a good picture of the lessons learned in evaluations on a range of topics, including networking, dissemination of results, human resource development, modes of external support, etc.

The list of EVIS questions is attached in Appendix B. Unfortunately, using EVIS is still somewhat cumbersome and slow due to its older design. The database is also limited in its ability to organize data vertically to do more sophisticated cross-referencing of answers. However, it is possible to print out EVIS reports in order to analyze large quantities of the long answers. Moreover, the Evaluation Unit is looking into ways to upgrade EVIS onto faster and more flexible software.

EVIS is a very useful tool for those wanting to read the comments evaluators have made on a variety of topics. The above analysis of project management and capacity building gives an indication of the interesting and important information contained in the database. The many ways of generating both quantitative and qualitative data from the system support a broad spectrum of research needs throughout IDRC. In a time of promoting results-oriented research, the ability to use information from evaluations of previous initiatives will become increasingly important.

For more information on the EVIS system and details on how to use the database, contact the Evaluation Unit.

Endnotes

1. EVIS Report 41. *Social Science Research in the Southern Cone, Volume I and II*. 1980.
2. EVIS Report 81. *Evaluation Report: Program Support in Chile*. 1988.
3. EVIS Report 130. *The African Economic Research Consortium (AERC): An Evaluation of Phase II and a Look Ahead to Phase III*. 1990.
4. EVIS Report 123. *An Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording and Management System Project in Sri Lanka*. 1989.
5. EVIS Report 80.7. *Evaluation of Urban Hydrogeology Projects - Urban Hydrogeology, Thailand*. 1990.
6. EVIS Report 30. *Sorghum Improvement (Ethiopia) An Evaluation*. 1978.
7. EVIS Report 99. *Report of the Fourth Year Evaluation of the IDRC/CIDA Co-Financed BAIF Research Foundation - Rural Research Project*. 1992
8. EVIS Report 34. *Cassava Research Program Evaluation (Report)*. 1984.
9. EVIS Report 8. *Sorghum Milling in Botswana: A Development Impact Case Study*. 1982.
10. EVIS Report 102. *Evaluation of Oilseeds Network (Ethiopia) 87-0025 Phase II. Final Report*. 1992.
11. EVIS Report 28. *Andean Pact: Technology Policy*. 1976.
12. EVIS Report 108. *Bean Network Evaluation Report for the International Development Research Centre*. 1989.
13. EVIS Report 26. *Evaluation of Technical and Social Progress (TASP) Project*. 1977.
14. EVIS Report 118. *Report on the Economic Research Consortium, Peru*. 1993.
15. EVIS Report 32. *Report on the Evaluation of the Agricultural Research Projects Supported by IDRC*. 1984.
16. EVIS Report 29. *Evaluation of Regional Research and Training Programs Agricultural Development Council*. 1976.
17. EVIS Report 117. *Evaluation of Three Strata Forage System - TSFS - Indonesia. Phase II*. 1993.

18. EVIS Report 80.7. *Evaluation of Urban Hydrogeology Projects - Urban Hydrogeology, Thailand*. 1990.
19. EVIS Report 127. *African Economic Research Consortium (AERC): Research, Training and Related Activities*. 1990.
20. EVIS Report 73. *The Pearson Fellowship Program. An Evaluation*. 1990.
21. EVIS Report 56. *With Our Own Hands: Jamaica's National Information System*. 1985.
22. EVIS Report 105. *International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA)/ East and Southern African Root Crops Research Network (ESARRN) End of Project Review*. 1992.
23. EVIS Report 66. *The Multidisciplinary Research Centre for Rural Development (CIMDER) - An Evaluation*. Centro de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias en Desarrollo. 1989.
24. EVIS Report 130. *The African Economic Research Consortium (AERC): An Evaluation of Phase II and a Look Ahead to Phase III*. 1993.
25. EVIS Report 99. *Report of the Fourth Year Evaluation of the IDRC/CIDA Co-Financed BAIF Research Foundation - Rural Research Project*. 1992.

Appendix A

Introduction to the EVIS database

EVIS is a database which contains information about evaluations of IDRC programs and projects. It is maintained by the Evaluation Unit, Corporate Affairs and Initiatives Division (CAID). Evaluations in the IDRC are conducted by the Evaluation Unit, the Centre divisions and the regional offices. Each evaluation report contains information on one or more IDRC projects that have been the subject of the evaluation study. Information from evaluation reports dating back to the early years of the Centre have been entered into the database. While evaluation reports are kept in hard copy by both the Evaluation Unit and the IDRC Library, EVIS provides electronic access to summary information from each of these reports and allows the user to query and tabulate across reports.

The aim of EVIS is to provide readily accessible evaluation information for program and project planning and policy-making within the Centre. The database contains "lessons learned" across a broad range of IDRC projects and programs. This corporate memory is critical to program staff who draw upon the lessons of past experience in the design and implementation of new research projects.

The database is also a research tool for both internal and external use. It provides information on projects and programs that have been evaluated, information on the evaluation reports themselves and summaries of the major findings of each evaluation report. Having this data readily-accessible and comparable across divisions allows Centre staff to collect information on numerous facets of evaluation findings within the Centre. The database can also be used by external users who are interested in IDRC's evaluation system and on the "lessons learned" from the Centre's evaluation experience.

The structure of EVIS allows the user to search for information either for one specific evaluation report, or for information on common issues that can be aggregated across a number of different evaluation studies. There are three main types of information in EVIS:

1. **Project/Program Information** which contains basic information on the project/program that is the subject of the evaluation study. This includes project title, number, managing division, country of research, research institution, budget size and project dates. Project data residing in EVIS has been loaded from IDRC's corporate databases.
2. **Evaluation Report Information** which provides summary information on the evaluation study itself. This information includes the evaluation report authors, affiliation of the authors (Centre staff, consultants etc.), the division that conducted the evaluation, the rationale for the study, the dates the study was conducted in, the Divisional activity number (DAP), and cost of the evaluation study. This section also contains a summary of the main conclusions and recommendations of the report. Finally, there is a critique of the evaluation report itself.

3. Evaluation Findings which contain the major findings of the evaluation study in summary form. The structure for evaluation findings has been standardized for all evaluation reports by a set of 34 pre-defined questions (for a list of these questions, please see Appendix B). Where evaluation reports dealt with specific questions, a **yes**, **no** or **yes/no** was answered and text was taken from the report to support the response. In cases where the report was definite in the answering of a particular question, a yes or a no with text is the information provided. In cases where the answer was conditional on certain factors, or yes in certain circumstances and no in others, a yes/no response is given with text to support both responses. The questions used in the evaluation findings can be divided into four thematic issues:

- (i) Planning and design
- (ii) Implementation and operations
- (iii) Results and outcomes
- (iv) Lessons learned and policy issues.

Source: Philip Ward. 1992. *EVIS Evaluation Information System User's Manual*. IDRC: Evaluation Unit, Corporate Affairs and Initiatives Division, pp.1-2.

Appendix B

Questions on the EVIS Database

EVIS Question I.D.	Question
PLANNING	
2.01	Was the analysis of the development context and the research response adequate?
2.02	Was the review of related research initiatives adequate?
2.03	Was the initiative compatible with official LDC development and research priorities?
2.04	Was the design of the intervention consistent with the research problem that was to be addressed?
IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATIONS	
3.01	Did the host institution effectively administer and manage the initiative?
3.02	Did the host institution provide the necessary technical support for the initiative?
3.03	Was the host government's support for the initiative adequate?
3.04	Did the users of the research play a role in designing and implementing the initiative?
3.05	Were the donor's administrative and management procedures appropriate?
3.06	Was the donor's technical support adequate?
3.07	Were the donor's procedures in support of training adequate?
3.08	Was the donor's "method" of operation acceptable?
3.09	Did external factors adversely affect implementation?

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Questions on the EVIS Database

EVIS Question I.D.	Question
RESULTS/ OUTCOMES	
4.01	Generally, were the overall objectives of the initiative achieved?
4.02	Were training objectives met?
4.03	Generally, was research and/or institutional capacity improved?
4.04	Did the initiative lead to the generation of new "research" results, knowledge, methods, and/or technology?
4.05	Were the outcomes of the initiative adequately promoted and disseminated?
4.06	Did the outcomes of this research benefit users (ie. through the generation of new "research results" etc.)
4.07	Were linkages between national, regional, and/or international researchers enhanced?
4.08	Were linkages between researchers and facilitating or intermediary organizations adequate?
4.09	As a results of the initiative, were new opportunities identified in the host institution?
4.10	As a result of the initiative, did the host institution become more sustaining?
ISSUES	
5.01	Did the report comment on the "R" for "D" process?
5.02	Did the report comment on institution strengthening?
5.03	Did the report comment on the value of human resource development?
5.04	Did the report comment on the dissemination of results (transferability)?

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Questions on the EVIS Database

EVIS Question I.D.	Question
5.05	Did the report comment on the adoption of new "research" results, technology, methods or knowledge?
5.06	Did the report comment on an different research approaches in the LDC's?
5.07	Did the report comment on the minimum critical mass needed for effective research?
5.08	Did the report suggest an appropriate balance between programming versus administrative support?
5.09	Did the report comment on the different ways to organize and deliver external support? (modalities)
5.10	Did the report comment on the duration of external support?
5.11	Did the report comment on the need to integrate research activities?

Appendix C

Quick Questions and Answers from EVIS

Q What is the most frequently addressed issue in evaluation reports?

A Whether the outcomes of the research benefitted users. 80% of all evaluation reports on the EVIS database address this issue.

Did the outcomes of the research benefit users?

Percentage of evaluation reports which addressed this issue	80%
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Answers:

Yes, research outcomes did benefit users	50%
No, research outcomes did not benefit users	13%
Mixed results	37%

Q How well were IDRC projects designed to meet identified research problems?

A IDRC has a mixed record on this issue. 64% of EVIS reports answer the question 2.04, with a surprisingly high number stating that the design was not consistent with the research problem.

Was the design of the intervention consistent with the research problem that was to be addressed?

Percentage of evaluation reports which addressed this issue:	64%
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Answers:

Yes, the design was consistent with the research problem	44%
No, the design was not consistent with the research problem	29%
Mixed results	27%

Q How often did users of research help design and implement IDRC-supported initiatives?

A Of the 157 reports currently on EVIS, 62, or 39% of them, address this issue. Of those 62, the responses, the following answers are given:

Did the users of the research play a role in designing and implementing the initiative?

Percentage of evaluation reports which addressed this issue: 39%

Answers:

Yes, users played a role in design and implementation	45%
No, users did not play a role in design and implementation	34%
Mixed results	23%

Q Do IDRC initiatives generally meet their overall objectives?

A Yes, they do. Almost 70% of evaluations on EVIS addressed this question, and over 60% of those stated that yes, the initiative generally met its objectives. Very few evaluations reported that objectives were not met at all.

Generally, were the overall objectives of the initiative achieved?

Percentage of evaluation reports which addressed this issue: 69%

Answers:

Yes, the initiative generally met its objectives	61%
No, the initiative generally did not meet its objectives	10%
Mixed results	29%

Q Did including users in project design and implementation increase the likelihood of the initiative ultimately benefitting them?

A As seen in the Table 1, there seems to be some correlation between users' involvement in the implementation and design of a project and the initiative ultimately being of benefit to them. The highest correlation is in the Yes, Yes box: in 28% of the cases, when the users played a role, they benefitted from the outcomes. Moreover, when users played a limited role, the outcomes benefitted them somewhat (Y/N, Y/N = 18%). However, the data does not support categorical conclusions on this issue, for the percentage of cases in which users did not play a role and where outcomes did not benefit them (No, No) is rather low, at only 9%. Obviously, user involvement in design and implementation is not the only factor contributing to results being of benefit to them, for in 14% of the EVIS reports where both questions were answered, users did not play a role, but the results still benefitted them to some degree.

Table 1. Benefits to users correlated to user involvement in design

N=56

4.06 Did the outcomes of this research benefit users?	3.04 Did the users of the research play a role in designing and implementing the initiative?						
	Answers	Yes		No		Y/N	
		%	(#)	%	(#)	%	(#)
	Yes	28	(16)	7	(4)	5	(3)
	No	4	(2)	9	(5)	2	(1)
	Y/N	13	(7)	14	(8)	18	(10)

Of course, one should be wary of decontextualized statistics and bivariate analysis, but if coupled with an analysis of the long answers in EVIS, such cross-tabulations can point to interesting correlations between issues.